

## MURRAY BOOKCHIN'S THEORY OF SOCIAL ECOLOGY

An Appraisal of *The Ecology of Freedom*

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*Murray Bookchin's theory of social ecology is perhaps the most comprehensive and powerful ecological philosophy yet developed. It involves a complex, detailed, interdisciplinary framework that has been developed during the course of Bookchin's career and demands keen learning from the reader. The payoff is well worth it, however, for Bookchin provides important tools for thinking about the relation between society and nature and how the human antagonism with the natural world might be resolved. Focusing on Bookchin's 1991 work, *The Ecology of Freedom*, the author lays out the philosophical and historical underpinnings of social ecology and its analysis of hierarchy.*

A century ago, Marx could validly argue that the alternatives to socialism are barbarism. Harsh as the worst of these alternatives may be, society could at least expect to recover from them. Today the situation has become far more serious. The ecological crisis of our time has graduated society's alternative to a more decisive level of futuristic choices. Either we will create an ecotopia based on ecological principles, or we will simply go under as a species. In my view this is not apocalyptic ranting—it is a scientific judgment validated daily by the very law of the prevailing society. (pp. 70-71)

—Bookchin (1980)

Murray Bookchin is a living testament to the triumphs and failures of the American Left of this century. A vital link between the old and new Left and beyond, Bookchin's work has evolved in response to the turbulent eras in which he lived. Bookchin was a part of the traditional Left in the United States during the 1930s, but unlike Sidney Hook, Max Eastman, and numerous others, the twin evils of Stalinism and McCarthyism only reinforced his radicalism and pushed him farther to the left. Rather than joining the ranks of former socialists who drifted toward liberalism and neoconservatism, Bookchin began, in the 1950s, to develop a creative synthesis of anarchist and ecological theories while participating in numerous social and ecological movements. His linkage of ecology and revolutionary politics came at a time when the Left tended to reject ecology as a trivial or diversionary bourgeois concern.

The unifying thread that winds throughout the course of Bookchin's development over five decades as an activist and writer is his consistent revolutionary stance to the degradation of the natural and social worlds. As a result of his creative rethinking of the European and American radical traditions, Bookchin fused ecology and anarchism into an original theory he calls *ecoanarchism* or *social*

*ecology*, one that offers a powerful critique of and alternative to liberalism, Marxism, postmodern theory, and ecological theories such as ecofeminism and deep ecology.

Histories of the American Left and the antinuclear and ecology movements are only now beginning to reflect the originality and importance of Bookchin's work. In 1952, during a time when chemicals were celebrated as the means to better living and before the work of Rachel Carson or Barry Commoner was well known, Bookchin began to advance a social critique of a serious ecological crisis (see Herber [Bookchin], 1952). He was among the first to warn of the dangers of chemicals in food, of nuclear energy, and of radiation fallout. When others were pressing forward with growth-oriented ideologies, he advanced pioneering calls for decentralized cities and bioregions and for the use of solar, wind, water, and other alternative technologies (Bookchin, 1962). He was among the first to grasp the ethical, social, and political implications of ecology, and he was speaking about hierarchy when the Left was still mired in orthodox notions of class.

The importance of Bookchin's work has not gone unnoticed. Peter Marshall (1992), for example, in his exhaustive account of anarchist history, *Demanding the Impossible*, described Bookchin as "the thinker who has most renewed anarchist thought and action since the Second World War" (p. 602). Bookchin has been a major influence on contemporary green movements and on various forms of ecological thought around the world. Yet, his work is certainly neither uncontroversial nor uncritically received. His attacks on various reformist, antihumanist, and mystical philosophies, particularly his broadsides against deep ecology, have earned him more enemies than friends and have tended to polarize people into either deep or social ecology camps. Much to Bookchin's dismay, some have attempted to mediate this conflict in the form of a deep social ecology that he insists conflates contradictory methods and values.<sup>1</sup>

Bookchin's first writings were concerned with American imperialism and political repression; the growing problems of a chemically laden, technologically constituted, synthetic environment; and consequences of an ever-developing urban environment for human beings and the natural world. The major concerns of Bookchin's later theory of social ecology are well-anticipated in these early writings, such that by 1952, he had already developed substantive links between social and environmental problems. By the late 1950s, Bookchin articulated a broad theory of ecology that included urban and rural environments in addition to concerns with human health.

As a dialectician in the tradition of Aristotle, Hegel, and Marx, Bookchin breaks with all static and essentialist views of reality. Bookchin not only analyzes reality in terms of its developmental possibilities, he also shows how opposites are interdependent, and he tries to effect a synthesis between the opposed terms. Similar to Marx, Bookchin rejects Hegel's idealist definition of dialectics, but he also refuses Engels's crude mechanistic reading of nature and what he takes to be Marx's own antiecological views. Bookchin finds Marx's materialist recasting of dialectics inadequate insofar as it fails to break from the Western ideology of the natural world as something inert, cruel, and stingy, as the realm of necessity rather than freedom, as the Other of the human world to be subdued and conquered. Unlike any of these theorists, Bookchin seeks to ecologize the dialectical method and to unify the study of natural and social worlds in a comprehensive theory that sees human beings and the natural world as potentially complementary, not antagonistic, partners in evolution.

Bookchin's theory of dialectical naturalism interprets nature, society, and the human individual as dynamic processes that constantly change. Bookchin identifies a coherence to the entire process of evolution, and he rejects nominalistic postmodern theories that see history as nothing but random events. In bold contrast, Bookchin (1990) interprets the process of natural and social evolution as a "remarkable biological drama" (p. 41) that unfolds in ever richer diversity and forms of complexity, ultimately leading to a richly elaborated human culture that expresses the creativity of nature. Unfortunately, as he chronicles, the possibilities for freedom latent in nature and history are aborted with the tortured development of hierarchical social institutions during the span of human evolution.

Bookchin attempts to generate an ecological ethics from the developmental tendencies of the natural world, as they tend toward greater freedom, creativity, and individuality. In a bold move, he tries to ground normative values in natural evolution itself (thereby rejecting the positivist separation of fact from value), while sharply distinguishing his naturalistic ethics from reactionary and sociobiological versions that appeal to nature to legitimate social hierarchy and anti-individual philosophies. He seeks, therefore, to overcome all relativistic forms of ethics such as emotivism or decisionism or those championed by current postmodern philosophies. A key task of Bookchin's ecological ethics is to provide rational grounds for the critique of the degradation of the natural and social worlds and to construct a positive ethic of biotic and social development. For Bookchin, ethics serves as a normative guide to what can and should exist given humanity's developing potentialities for freedom, self-consciousness, and cooperation instead of the irrationality of what merely *is*, humanity's degraded state of being and grossly unrealized potential. This entails an "ethics of complementarity" that seeks to harmonize natural and social evolution and to endow human beings with responsibility for the integrity of natural processes.

At present date, Bookchin has written over a dozen books, with many more in the works on topics relating to issues such as the history of modern revolutions and cosmology. Throughout five decades of writing and activism, he has carefully elaborated a detailed position on social ecology. Whether one's sympathies lie with ecofeminism, deep ecology, bioregionalism, or any other contemporary position, no ecological thinker can afford to bypass a serious confrontation with Bookchin's work. If there is one classic work in his corpus that best captures his themes, it would have to be *The Ecology of Freedom* (published in 1972, revised in 1991). Subtitled *The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*, this lengthy work maps the entire sweep of history, from the focus of how hierarchy first appeared and developed, how various groups resisted it, and how it can be dismantled. Although Bookchin has evolved beyond certain positions taken in this book, it remains his longest and most comprehensive statement of social ecology and is the foundation here for my discussion of his theory of social ecology and analysis of hierarchy.

## DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL ECOLOGY

Environmentally, we are a beleaguered species—not by natural forces that inflict material scarcity and toil as unavoidable features of the human condition, but by social forces that create irrational relations and requirements as utterly needless features of our lifeways. (Bookchin, 1962, pp. xlvii-xlviii)

From its first inception in 1952 to the publication of *The Ecology of Freedom* in 1971, Bookchin's theory of social ecology had evolved into a rich and nuanced

position, acquiring historical, anthropological, philosophical, ethical, and political dimensions. From his initial linkages of environmental and health problems stemming from agribusiness, chemical food processing, nuclear fallout, and radiation poisoning to social problems involving the capitalist economy and urbanization, Bookchin has probed into the fundamental issue underlying all of his research: the disharmony between human beings and the natural world, such as stems from the conflictual relations humanity has with itself.

Most generally, social ecology analyzes the intricate, dialectical relationship between nature and society and sees human beings as the products of both natural and social evolution. Social ecology claims that all current environmental problems are ultimately social problems, rooted in an irrational and antiecological society whose crises cannot be solved through piecemeal, single-issue reform measures. Dislocations in the human-nature relation stem from dislocations within the human world itself; environmental problems emerge from a long history of hierarchical social relations that culminate in a class-ridden, profit-driven, accumulation-oriented capitalist society. Accurately stated, the problems that lead to the human antagonism with nature emerge "from within social development itself—not between society and nature" (Bookchin, 1990, p. 32). Whereas many Marxists argue that the domination of humans over nature preceded the domination of human over human and was necessary for human freedom to finally unfold, Bookchin reverses this causal relation and rejects the idea that humans ever had to dominate nature, thereby forming class societies, for freedom someday to emerge from the wreckage.

Bookchin argues that environmental problems are social problems as opposed to spiritual, technological, governmental, or biological problems. The environmental crisis involves all of these dimensions, but it does not principally stem from any one of them. Hence, the diagnoses of liberal environmentalism and deep ecology, to name just two approaches, do not grasp the root of the problem. Global warming, the destruction of the rain forests, the dumping of toxic wastes, and the overconsumption of resources exist not so much because human beings have developed anthropocentric attitudes, abuse their technological genius, cannot adequately govern themselves, or are breeding out of control, but rather because they have a long history of dominating each other and of colonizing the social and natural worlds as mere resources for power and profit.

If environmental problems have social causes, then they require social methods of analysis rather than, for example, the philosophical or biologically oriented approaches of deep ecology that focus on alienation from nature and overpopulation. It follows, moreover, that the environmental crisis requires social-institutional solutions that strive to abolish hierarchical relationships within society rather than to place faith in technological or governmental reforms (liberal environmentalism) or to find the deep self in harmony with natural ways (deep ecology). The environmental crisis will not disappear through the greening of capitalism (*green capitalism* is a blatant oxymoron) or through meditation, chanting, and earth rituals. Bookchin does not deny that new ethics, philosophies, and sensibilities are required to realign our relations with one another and the natural world, but above all, he asserts the need for a new politics, for new social movements capable of reconstructing a society irredeemably destructive of the natural and social worlds into an ecologically oriented society dedicated to preserving biotic diversity and realizing human potentialities for freedom and self-realization.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, if we want to understand the overall environmental crisis, we have to look to the social dynamics that cause and ultimately require the transmogrification of natural environments into toxic synthetic environments that disrupt and destroy

balanced and bountiful ecologies. The social aspect of Bookchin's theory concentrates immediately on the economics and dynamics of capitalist society but, more generally, it encompasses the entire array of hierarchical relationships that have mediated the interaction of human beings with one another and natural systems throughout so much of their history. Consequently, the social dimension of social ecology entails analysis of age, gender, ethnic relations, bureaucracies, and class modes of domination, as well as all various ideologies conditioned by these social factors.

Social ecology seeks to reveal the historical factors "that have rendered many human beings into parasites on the world of life rather than active partners in organic evolution" (Bookchin, 1990, p. 32). To discern the reasons behind this crisis, Bookchin develops a philosophical anthropology concerned with the specificity of human beings in relation to nonhuman animals, a genealogy of the emergence of hierarchy in history, an ethics of how human beings should relate to the natural world, and an anarchist or radical libertarian politics that seeks to design the institutional forms of freedom for a posthierarchical world. All along, social ecology is guided and informed by a utopian vision of a postscarcity society that realizes human potentialities as it harmonizes human evolution with natural evolution. This vision is not merely utopian because it grounds itself on actual existing possibilities for transformation. All of these issues are informed by Bookchin's distinct methodology, dialectical naturalism, which traces the contours of both biological and social evolution, analyzes the mechanisms of conflict and change, and ferrets out potentialities for human freedom that can unfold in the only place they can take root and thrive—an ecological society of the future.

### **FROM BIOLOGICAL TO SOCIAL EVOLUTION: FIRST AND SECOND NATURE**

The claim that environmental problems have their sources in social problems should be obvious from an unprejudiced examination of current society, but the validity of the argument requires historical contextualization and verification. The historical component of social ecology involves a genealogy of the origin and development of hierarchy in human social life, and this history is inextricably wedded to a philosophical anthropology. As the phrase suggests, this not only involves a historical or comparative study of different human cultures, but it also raises philosophical and normative questions about the nature of human beings as a distinct species, who they are, what they need, and how they flourish.

Typically, a philosophical anthropology explores human beings as both social and natural beings, examining, in Max Scheler's (1969) phrase, "man's place in nature." Drawing from the anthropological work of Peter Kropotkin, Paul Radin, Dorothy Lee, and others, Bookchin undertakes his own unique investigation in the form of the question: What is the place of the human being in natural evolution? As a dialectical thinker, Bookchin insists on the importance of "natural evolution" over "nature" because nature is not a static background against which the human adventure plays out, but rather a dynamic process of unfolding complexity and subjectivity that eventually leads to human life itself. Nature, for Bookchin (1991), represents "a cumulative evolutionary process from the inanimate to the animate and ultimately the social" (p. xx). The emphasis on cumulative evolution allows Bookchin to emphasize both continuities and discontinuities in the shift from natural to social evolution.

Bookchin believes we cannot begin to think straight about human beings, the natural world, and the interaction between them until we draw a fundamental distinction, borrowed from Cicero, between first and second nature. Bookchin refers to what is typically called *nature* as the natural world or first nature, the process of biological evolution and formation of animal communities (as distinguished from human societies). First nature is contrasted to second nature, the humanly created world, the process of social evolution. As soon as the evolution of animal life leads to the emergence of *Homo sapiens*, phasing into beings endowed with language and a sophisticated neocortex, a second nature is constituted, one characterized by an unprecedented complexity of intelligence and ability to effect changes in the natural environment. "By second nature, I mean the development of a uniquely human culture, with a wide variety of institutionalized human communities, effective human technics, richly symbolic languages, and carefully managed sources of nutriment" (Bookchin, 1995a, p. 118). The word *nature* in *second nature* is important because it underlines the continuity between human beings and their natural history and environment, whereas the term *second* emphasizes the uniqueness of the species that consciously and linguistically mediates its relation to its surroundings.

Because society evolves from nature and always remains embedded within it, a major philosophical task for Bookchin is how to properly conceive the relation between nature and society. Bookchin's solution to the problem is dialectical, grasping nature and society as a differentiated unity comprising two elements that have their own character and, at the same time, are inseparably interrelated. Bookchin, therefore, eschews both dualistic positions that rigidly divorce the natural and social worlds (such as Western anthropocentric philosophies, and monistic positions that collapse the differences between them). Whereas deep ecology focuses on the first fallacy, social ecology concentrates on the second, committed when one interprets either the social world through biological models (e.g., certain schools of urban ecology, Malthusian theories, and sociobiology) or the natural world through social models (various forms of anthropomorphism).

Malthusian theories of all kinds—from Malthus himself, to Paul Ehrlich's (1968) *The Population Bomb*, to deep ecology—come under heavy fire for addressing human overpopulation in merely biological terms (e.g., human beings overshooting the carrying capacity of the planet) rather than targeting underlying social causes, such as poverty, imperialism, and patriarchy. But Bookchin also emphasizes the grave implications of various forms of anthropomorphism. He strongly rejects the mindless expansion of terms like *domination*, *exploitation*, *hierarchy*, *coercion*, *rights*, and *status* to animals and the natural world. Human beings can degrade the earth or abuse animals, but they cannot "dominate" nature or "exploit" animals because these terms are strictly social in their origin and field of application. This is the reason why Bookchin typically writes "the concept of the 'domination of nature' " rather than "the domination of nature"; he is trying to emphasize, among other things, that the domination of nature is an ideology and that part of this ideology is the conflation of first and second nature.

The indiscriminate mixing of languages proper to first and second nature leads to the confusion of predation with war, foraging with labor, acts of aggression with domination—in short, animal with human behavior. The issue is not merely academic, Bookchin claims, for the terminological conflation of first and second nature has produced the utmost havoc and considerable ideological mischief. Specifically, Bookchin argues, by projecting hierarchy into first nature, theorists

unwittingly establish domination as an immutable fact of life rather than as something contingent that can be changed.

In contrast to dualistic and monistic positions and to both anthropocentrism and biocentrism, Bookchin seeks to understand how society slowly phased out of natural conditions in a graded and cumulative way and to use the language appropriate to each stage of development. Dualism destroys the lines of continuity between first and second nature and creates a rift of alienation of human beings from the natural world. Monism can yield either a materialist theory, such as sociobiology or positivism, that reduces social phenomena to natural laws, or an idealist approach, such as animism or mystical ecology, that spiritualizes all reality.

Bookchin's dialectical trope, "unity in difference," by contrast, steers between these false options to establish the fact that human beings and their social institutions have evolved from biological conditions to attain unprecedented levels of complexity, consciousness, and freedom, all of which express latent tendencies present in the self-organizing complexity of first nature. This argument, therefore, shatters the dualism enshrined in Western thought, which rigidly separates nature and freedom. Bookchin, by contrast, shows how freedom is a latent possibility within nature. Both first and second nature belong to the same process of biotic differentiation. Rather than seeing society, culture, and the human mind itself as independent and apart from nature, social ecology traces their evolution from natural conditions and shows the rich mediations between nature and culture in the form of blood ties, age and gender hierarchies, and prolonged parental care of human young.

### **THE GENEALOGY OF HIERARCHY: FROM ORGANIC SOCIETY TO CAPITALISM**

We have to know how hierarchy arose if we are to undo it. (Bookchin, 1991, p. xxi)

As human beings evolved out of first nature, they established traditional societies organized around communitarian norms and simple lifeways. Bookchin identifies the earliest social form as *organic societies*, and the task of social ecology is to clarify their nature, to analyze their transformation into hierarchical societies, and to identify what is positive and of enduring import for a nonhierarchical society of the future.

With Nietzsche, Bookchin seeks to delegitimize the ideologies of the present by exposing the historical forces that constructed them and to recuperate certain values from the past. To delegitimize the present capitalist form of social organization, it is of vital importance to recover historical memory. Bookchin intends to rescue a memory of a past not dominated by commodification, private property, a market economy, and a lust for profit and exploitation. For Bookchin, knowledge of the past serves two purposes. First, it provides a critical contrast to the present, a vast social stratum of radically different lifeways and values that help to challenge the widespread sense that social life was always organized around profit, competition, growth, and separation from nature. Second, the past is a vital accumulation of traditions that can be appropriated and developed for the future. Hence, it is crucial for Bookchin that scholars preserve the valuable legacies of the past so as not to lose them:

We must not permit these alternatives to be discarded; far from belonging to the dustbin of history, they should be seen as a treasure trove of discernible institutions, experiences, and experiments, as well as imaginative ideas that never saw the light of day—a treasure that we must keep alive for the future. (Bookchin, 1991, p. lii)

Unlike Nietzsche and epigones such as Foucault, however, Bookchin is charting not the decline of Western society into ever greater forms of domination, but rather an ambiguous history of both domination and freedom. Rather than reviling the past as merely a kaleidoscope of shifting forms of power and domination, Bookchin offers a complex dialectic of the dual legacies of freedom and domination that can bring human beings to awareness of their power to create their future. Indeed, Bookchin's vision of history is not Nietzschean, but is rather a Hegelian and Marxian vision of an evolving history whose accomplishments can be consciously appropriated in an *Aufhebung* of the past and present (for a detailed analysis of the difference between these two types of historical narratives, see Best, 1995).

Bookchin's genealogy of hierarchy emphasizes two momentous breaks: (a) the transition from organic to hierarchical societies and, within the evolving cultures of hierarchy, (b) the shift from precapitalist societies organized around communal and nonmonetary values to capitalist societies favoring competitive struggles for money and power. For Bookchin, hierarchy is a social, not a natural or biological, phenomenon; it emerges as a result of complex social dynamics and not, as sociobiologists and others contend, from instinctual or genetic factors that necessitate struggle, competition, and violence or that make some human beings inherently more intelligent and capable than others. Hierarchy, Bookchin claims, is a matter of contingency, not necessity or destiny, and therefore it can be eradicated from human life and replaced with relationships of equality and freedom. But unless we understand the nature of hierarchy, where it came from, and how it operates, Bookchin avers, we will never be able to extirpate its various roots and we will reproduce it in our struggle for a future society.

Bookchin (1991) defines hierarchy as "the cultural, traditional, and psychological systems of obedience and command, not merely the economic and political systems to which the terms *class* and *state* most appropriately refer. I view it historically and existentially as a complex system of command and obedience in which elites enjoy varying degrees of control over their subordinates without necessarily exploiting them [economically]" (p. 4). For every possible line of difference within a human being, among human beings, and between human beings and other forms of life, a hierarchy can arise and has emerged. In its many manifestations, hierarchy is the domination of old over young, men over women, bureaucracy over people, one ethnic group over another, town over country, and intellect over emotion. Bookchin sees hierarchy not only as a social or material phenomenon, institutionally grounded and often backed by violent force, but also as an ideological and subjective force that penetrates into the consciousness and lived experience of individuals, becoming an attitude, worldview, or self-image, such that the state also becomes a state of mind.

This multilayered definition of hierarchy in *The Ecology of Freedom* was very influential in its critique of Marxist historical narratives that conflated hierarchy with (class) domination. Bookchin's analysis of patriarchy, for example, both vindicated and inspired feminist efforts to wrest the domination of men over women



from the Procrustean bed of economics and class. As Bookchin argued convincingly, the class oppression identified by Marxists is only one of many types of oppression, including age and gender, which in no way are reducible to class. Marxist reductionism blinds theorists to the multiplicity of types of hierarchy and, therefore, the need for various modes of struggle.

In Bookchin's work, organic society is both the historical and normative contrast to a hierarchical society structured around systems of command and obedience. This does not involve a simplistic opposition between good and evil, however, because hierarchical societies help to advance emancipatory dynamics in some ways as they stifle them in others, and organic societies lack crucial resources for human freedom that were developed by hierarchical societies. Nevertheless, Bookchin looks to organic societies for providing certain viable alternatives to hierarchical societies that should be appropriated for a future society. A significant virtue of Bookchin's interpretation of history is the avoidance of two extremes: either stigmatizing the past as savage, barbaric, and ignorant, as the benighted darkness before the brilliance of modern science and technology, or romanticizing the past as a lost golden age, populated with benevolent and robust people, thriving until corroded by advanced civilization. Bookchin's goal at all times is to examine history for both advances and regresses, each of which is a normative evaluation to be assessed in terms of his understanding of freedom.

For Bookchin, an organic society is any society, past or present, in which human life is organized on a noncoercive, cooperative, and egalitarian basis, such that human beings exist in harmony with one another and the natural world. By *harmony*, Bookchin means a state in which human beings occupy different social roles yet cooperate with and respect one another, a mutual bond made possible because the social institutions promote cooperation and equality rather than competition and domination. Similarly, Bookchin speaks of harmony between human beings and the natural world. Here too there is a difference, an understanding that human beings are distinct from the natural world, but there is also a sense of unity and belonging of human beings to larger processes of life.

On Bookchin's reading, hierarchy, competition, individualism, private property, the concept of the domination of nature, and other institutions and attitudes of later history are unknown to organic societies. Organic societies emerge spontaneously out of a human need for cooperation and mutual care. Informed by values of mutual aid and responsibility to all, organic societies ensured that each individual was able to meet basic subsistence needs in conditions of scarcity. This irreducible minimum was ensured through a usufruct system that granted all members of society access to the resources of the community as needed, regardless of what they could contribute to the social fund of goods. Bookchin states that it would be wrong to characterize this as a system of collective property because there was no notion of property or ownership of any kind.

Organic societies are integrated around kinship ties, age groups, and a sexual division of labor, in which the biological relations of family, age, and sex interact in networks of interdependence and cooperation. These naturally emerging lines of social differentiation between family relations, old and young, and men and women are not defined and institutionalized as bases for status discrimination and systems of command and obedience. Differences are organized in complementary rather than hierarchical terms; there is a unity in diversity based on equality and mutual respect among all members of society.

Bookchin claims that the main lines of social difference are organized around age and sex. Elders are revered for their knowledge and experience, but they do not

exploit this as a basis for power and discrimination. Until age hierarchies emerge in the breakdown of organic society, children are treated as adults and the child quickly passes into adulthood through the respect of the elders and increasing social freedoms and responsibilities. Similarly, men and women occupy different social roles according to a division of labor rooted in biological differences relating to reproductive capacities and degrees of physical strength, but these differences complement one another in mutually supporting activities. In addition to being childbearers and the primary child rearers, women in organic societies are responsible for horticulture, food gathering, crafts, and domestic activities. By means of their superior muscular capacity and relative freedom from nurturing attachment to their children, the responsibilities of men are hunting, community defense, and war. Although women were neither as strong as men nor as free to hunt, Bookchin emphasizes that they did physically demanding work on par with men.

Against numerous male-biased accounts of early societies, Bookchin (1991, pp. 58-59) argues that, if anything, the contributions of women were more important than those of men because they were the probable inventors of horticulture and bestowed on society the legacy of nurturing values, whereas men created the tradition of competition and aggression. But Bookchin also rejects certain feminist arguments that organic societies were matriarchal societies because he believes that they were not hierarchically imbalanced on either side. Moreover, Bookchin renounces the radical feminist argument that all social evils, including class domination, stem from patriarchy and can be eradicated through gender equality. This argument, no different than the Marxist essentialism it responds to, is a gross oversimplification of a history of hierarchy that has multiple dimensions, including not only class domination and patriarchy but also gerontocracy, shamanistic guilds, warrior groups, chiefdoms, ethnic and vocational divisions, and statelike forms, none reducible to the other. No simplistic drama, whether that of the creation of surplus production or the male Indo-European invasions of pacific matricentric villages, can account for the complex, uneven emergence and development of hierarchy.

One of Bookchin's most controversial claims is that organic societies exist in harmony with the natural world because they exist in harmony with one another.<sup>3</sup> The institutional and conceptual logic of society, in other words, determines the human relation to the natural world. This entails that there is no inherent biological drive or social logic requiring the domination of nature. As Feuerbach (1957) argues that human beings project their psychological states into a hypostatized world of gods, with all their anthropomorphic qualities, so Bookchin claims that they project the characteristics of their social life into their relations with nature. Thus, if the social relations are harmonious, as in the case of the Wintu and Hopi, human beings create harmonious visions and mythologies that define them as part of the cosmos. If, however, the social world is fractured by hierarchy and rife with conflict, human beings inevitably project domineering values onto their relations with nature.

The shift to a patriarchal society that abandons cooperative values, for example, brings in its wake new male gods that directly reflect social changes. "If the community confers in assemblies, so too do the deities; if the impact of war on primitive urban democracies leads to the establishment of a supreme ruler, a supreme deity also tends to emerge" (Bookchin, 1991, p. 101). Once some human beings see others as nothing but objects to exploit, they foist similar attitudes on nature. The idea that humanity is destined to dominate nature springs from the domination of human over human and spreads throughout history like a poisonous weed. Thus, "the modern view of nature as a hostile, stingy 'other' grows histori-

cally out of a projection of warped hierarchical social relations onto the rest of the natural world" (Bookchin, 1991, p. 57). Consequently, Bookchin emphasizes the need to reharmonize social relationships "as a fundamental part of resolving the ecological crisis in any deep, long-lasting way" (Bookchin, 1991, p. 57).

Thus, a central argument that runs throughout Bookchin's work, formulated first in *The Ecology of Freedom*, is that (the notion of) the domination of nature is the direct result of the domination of human by human rather than the other way around. The historical emergence of hierarchy in human society overturned a social equilibrium of equality, which led to the domination of some groups of human beings over others and then to the idea or notion of the domination of nature. "Social domination," in its long, millennial history, "has given rise to all the religious, moral, and philosophical justifications for the domination of nature, the destruction of wildlife, and the destruction of human life. Every ecological problem we face today apart from those caused by nature itself has its roots in social problems" (Bookchin, 1986, p. 6). It is the hierarchical domination of human over human, not the misapplication of agriculture and technology, not industrialism, not overbreeding, and not anthropocentrism or humanism, that is at the root of the major crises disrupting both the social and natural worlds.

Because no society is static and each develops according to certain evolutionary dynamics, Bookchin emphasizes that early organic society sowed the seeds of its own destruction through the elaboration of its social roles and division of labor. It was not necessary that age, gender, and kinship relations give way to gerontocracies, patriarchy, military institutions, and eventually classes and states, but in a fragile social world easily divided by individual interests and group antagonisms, differences of complementarity evolved into systems of command and obedience governed by elites, the unity of organic society gave way to the clash of competing interests, and ideologies emerged to legitimate various hierarchies and to inculcate them as inevitable to subjugated individuals.

The transition to hierarchical society obviously is a major juncture in human history and merits raising and answering some crucial questions: "Who were these emerging elites? What was the basis of their privileges in early society? How did they rework organic society's forms of community status . . . into what were later to become class and [economically] exploitative societies?" (Bookchin, 1991, p. 74). How, in other words, did we get from there to here, from a system of usufruct to global capitalist domination, from the blood oath to the transnational state, from gender equality to universal patriarchy, from harmony with nature to destructive antagonism? If, as Bookchin suggests, it is the nature of human beings to be creative and innovative, why did human evolution take one path instead of another? Moreover, was this development inevitable? Were there other historical paths society could have taken? Are there still—or is it too late? And if it is not, how can we avoid reproducing the archaic legacy of domination in a future society we struggle for today? Clearly, the questions are not merely academic, and our ability to provide sound answers will determine the future of both the social and natural worlds.

On Bookchin's reading, hierarchy first stems from gerontocracy, as elders seek power over younger members of society, both men and women. From within the system of gerontocracy, however, patriarchy defines and refines itself, as male authority gradually asserts itself over women. Each form of domination emerges out of natural-based distinctions within organic society that become hierarchical relations of command and obedience. Gerontocracy sows the seeds for later antagonisms toward both the natural and social worlds, flowering only later in the

development of hierarchy, once “humanity is conceptually equipped to transfer its social antagonisms to the natural world outside” (Bookchin, 1991, p. 82). The hierarchical institutions that later emerge with politics and the state also have their origin in gerontocracy, for from within the ranks of the elders, an altogether new group emerges—the shamans, professionals in political manipulation—who validate the authority of the elders, heighten the masculine temperament of society, and form an incipient state and political apparatus.

The state is an alliance of men, emerging out of needs of war, that seeks to dominate society and absorb all local alliances. Bookchin argues that the reduction of the female to a mere object of male power and desire had enormous consequences for subsequent history, as the domination of man over woman led to the domination of man over man through classes and the state and the domination of human beings over the natural world. “The subjugation of her nature and its absorption into the nexus of patriarchal morality forms the archetypal act of domination that ultimately gives rise to man’s imagery of a subjugated nature” (Bookchin, 1991, p. 121). The fact that nature retains a female gender into the present time is a distant trace from a matricentric past and an enduring “expression of man’s continual violation of woman as nature and of nature as woman” (Bookchin, 1991, p. 121).

Bookchin certainly agrees with Marx about the importance of economic and class dynamics in the formation of hierarchical societies, but Bookchin is trying to theorize a significant prehistory of classes and economic exploitation in which kinship, not economics, is the primordial fact of society. Bookchin seeks to show, moreover, that various mechanisms existed in organic society, primarily the blood oath (kinship bonds) that prevented economic gain, the accumulation of surplus, and exploitation.

Before hierarchy and domination can be consolidated into social classes and economic exploitation; before reciprocity can give way to the “free exchange” of commodities; before usufruct can be replaced by private property, and the “irreducible minimum” by toil as the norm for distributing the means of life—before this immensely vast complex can be dissolved and replaced by a class, exchange, and propertied one, the blood oath with all its claims must be broken. (Bookchin, 1991, p. 86)

Thus, Marx reifies the economy as a separate and basic fact of life from the beginning, but in fact, kinship relations, the blood oath, and the usufruct system were the primary social-structuring forces relegating economics to a subordinate position so long as they survived in substantive form.

For Bookchin, the state is one of the consummate forces of domination in history. With the classical anarchist tradition, Bookchin sees the state as a professionalized political apparatus that takes over routine functions of social administration in a new form of government exercised by functionaries, bureaucrats, and armies. The state concentrates its power in centralized structures, and it enforces its laws through coercion and violence. The state does not emerge in vacuo and does not suddenly appear full-blown, as in Hobbes’s conception of a Leviathan endowed with absolute powers by some mythical social contract. Rather, the state is parasitic upon the hierarchical structures in social life first created by patriarchy. Similar to a cancer, it begins to devour other social forms and functions, eventually reaching the point in modern society at which it is coextensive with and inseparable from the social foundations of life. The state is therefore a hybridization of various social and political institutions (and not merely “the political arm of the ruling classes”

[Marx]), an elaboration of coercive mechanisms, regulatory procedures, and systems supporting the needs of class and general administration. As the state develops, it comes into conflict with other social forms such as guilds, neighborhoods, municipal assemblies, and cooperatives. Although there are many quasi-state forms that develop throughout history, such as in Oriental despotism, the state comes into its own in modern times only with the rise of the nation-state, which emerges hand in hand with the development of capitalism. As the nation-state is the culmination of state development, capitalism is the culmination of class development. But capitalism not only is a continuation of class dynamics, it also marks a total rupture in the fabric of history. Bookchin interprets capitalism as a totalizing system of economics that subsumes all previously autonomous ethical, social, and psychological issues to an economic logic. Unlike all precapitalist societies in which economic and technological dynamics were subordinated to and controlled by strong cultural and ethical constraints, capitalism abstracts the economy from social life and any sense of moral restraint to deify and absolutize economic growth as a goal in its own right, as the *raison d'être* of the modern world.

As a result of the profound changes wrought by the nation-state and the capitalist economy, Bookchin observes that the modern world marks a rupture from the entire prehistory of humanity, such that cooperation, mutual aid, self-management, personal relationships—the whole heritage of organic society—are nearly obliterated. The strong bonds of mutualism and community that thrive even in precapitalist class societies are almost totally engulfed by competition, egoism, greed, and fragmentation in modern capitalism. The final blow to organic society came during the mid-20th century with the mature development of consumerism, the commodification of everyday life and the psyche, and the dissolution of the nuclear family. Today, Bookchin claims, not only is society shredded, but selfhood itself is pulverized. Once an expansive domain of freedom inseparably linked to ethics, reason, and the autonomy of self-rule within democratic structures, the human ego is torn from all social bonds, turned mean and greedy, and placed in the grip of a mind-numbing consumerism.

### **ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS: POLITICS AND THE LEGACY OF FREEDOM**

If we do not do the impossible, we will be faced with the unthinkable. (Bookchin, 1980, p. 28)

Bookchin's genealogy of hierarchy is only one side of history, just one story involving the legacy of domination. He is equally concerned with telling another story, one that recuperates the alternative legacy of freedom. He seeks radical alternatives to the two faces of bourgeois selfhood, to both productivist and consumerist identities, and he finds a gold mine of liberatory ideas and practices in the premodern world that can be reconstructed for a libertarian and ecological society of the future.

Like Hegel, Marx, and Kropotkin, Bookchin sees the irony that forms of domination have also advanced historical development and engendered greater possibilities for freedom. Unlike these thinkers, however, Bookchin does not believe that hierarchical power was necessary for the emergence of freedom, and he argues that egalitarian social forms could have better advanced freedom. Rather than uncritically accepting hierarchy as necessary for freedom, and thereby legiti-

inating violence, bloodshed, imperialism, and psychologies deformed by aggression and greed, Bookchin looks to key turning points in history at which hierarchy and domination were steadfastly resisted in favor of communitarian and democratic modes of life. Rejecting economic and technological determinism, he tries to show that choices and alternative modes of development existed throughout history and, indeed, exist for us still (although they are rapidly shrinking).

Bookchin finds, for example, that early societies could have evolved along the lines of a matricentric, nonhierarchical culture rather than a patriarchal, priestly society based on warrior values, class domination, and rule of the state. Another key turning point of history emerged in the mid-19th century; rather than further developing the promise of new forms of commonwealth and cooperation between society and nature articulated in the first half of the century, there was a turn toward industrialism.

Although hierarchy predominated over freedom, and capitalism steadily vanquished all traditional forms of life, nothing was preordained or necessary about these developments. Thus, knowledge of history is crucial not only to avoid repeating past mistakes but also to become aware of where the human species stands at this moment, what our options are, and what alternative futures await us. The path to a sustainable, democratic future that harmonizes first and second nature must be guided by a broad definition and vision of freedom.

This vision is informed by knowledge of the imperishable standards for freedom that have been elaborated in past societies. Organic society bequeathed to history the principles of the equality of unequals, the irreducible minimum, and ethics of complementarity; Greek society bestowed invaluable principles of limit, moderation, and balance along with Athenian institutions of direct democracy; Christianity offered the notion of universal humanity; and late medieval cities endowed us with the principle of confederation. None of these ideals can be appropriated without modification and without being reworked in an entirely new social context. The contributions of the Greeks, for example, must be shorn of militarism, slavery, male domination, and exclusionary forms of citizenship, just as the bequest of Christianity must be divested from the authoritarian and supernatural elements of the Church. Yet, each belongs to the "repertoire of freedom that we can cull from the past," the "humanistic lifeways and realistic institutions that could provide workable examples for developing a free society" (Bookchin, 1991, p. liii).

Whatever boundaries may encompass the sufficient conditions of freedom, the crucial necessary condition is the elimination of capitalism. Thus, Bookchin argues, the legacies of human freedom can be realized and furthered only through a new social movement that builds on the radical traditions of the 19th and 20th centuries to create a qualitatively new social form. Unlike the more atavistic quarters of deep ecology, the goal of Bookchin's social ecology is not to return to the preindustrial past, but rather to boldly advance into a technological future that reconciles further human evolution with the continued evolution (read: diversification) of the natural world. Bookchin's utopian goal involves the creation of a third nature, of a qualitatively new and different nature, an enlightened human species that consciously overcomes the antagonism between first and second nature while preserving and realizing (*Aufhebung*) the full potential for freedom, reason, and subjectivity as they have evolved through both natural and social evolution.

The means to this end is an anarchist politics or, in Bookchin's language, libertarian municipalism. An important part of the genealogical project in *The Ecology of Freedom* is a genealogy of leftist traditions themselves and a sifting and culling of the good from the bad. Bookchin finds that Marxism is aligned with the

authoritarian legacy of Western traditions—from the Roman state, to the papacy, to the modern state—whereas anarchism tends to be more closely associated with libertarian traditions stemming from the most progressive tendencies within Christianity and modern secular politics.

Bookchin rejects Marxism and other statist politics that attempt to organize political change according to hierarchical models that concentrate power in the hands of a minority. Instead, Bookchin calls for a decentralized politics in which activism is directly organized by the people themselves at local levels, without any representation or mediation, through a loosely connected organization of federations or ecocommunities. The nation-state, whether controlled by the Right or Left, has to be dissolved and replaced with confederated communities. This requires a reinvigoration of political participation on the municipal level and the classical project of citizenship, such as that first advanced in Athenian democracy with its notions of human scale, face-to-face interaction, and enlightened citizen participation.

Thus, Bookchin renounces the organization of the masses in parties in favor of their self-organization through affinity groups and forms of direct action that allow people to become aware of themselves as individuals who can shape their own future. Bookchin upholds the anarchist insistence that the means of revolution must reflect the end; hence, the revolution is the process of people becoming aware and involved in the process of reclaiming their lives, labor, cities, and, ultimately, the earth to which they belong.

## CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

The ecological movement will never gain any real influence or have any significant impact on society if it advances a message of despair rather than hope, of a regressive and impossible return to primordial human cultures and sensibilities, rather than a commitment to human progress and to a uniquely human empathy for life as a whole. (Bookchin, 1991, p. lix)

*The Ecology of Freedom* is a remarkably comprehensive book that analyzes the problem of hierarchy—both within human society and between human beings and the natural world—from numerous angles. As his first, longest, and most complex treatment of the theory and politics of social ecology, it holds a unique place in Bookchin's prolific output. It provides his most detailed analysis of hierarchy, technology, and freedom and establishes his philosophical anthropology while also offering a compelling and decidedly un-Nietzschean reading of the anarchist and libertarian dimensions of Christianity.

In fact, one of the more interesting moves of the book is a genealogy of the authoritarian and libertarian lineages of the modern Left as they stem from competing traditions within Christian politics. In Bookchin's narrative, one branch of Christianity spawned an authoritarian progeny that led from the papacy and the nation-state to the Jacobins, Marx, and the party apparatus of the Bolsheviks and Nazis, whereas another branch blossomed with libertarian fruit, continuing from 12th-century heretics banding together in decentralized cells to the Paris Commune of 1871, the Spanish Revolution, the new Left, the countercultures of the 1960s in the United States and France, and, Bookchin believes, to social ecology itself.

Unlike some of his interpreters, Bookchin does not refer to *The Ecology of Freedom* as his magnum opus because the phrase suggests one book can summarize his outlook and freezes his development at the year 1971. In the introduction to the 1991 edition of the book, "Twenty Years Later . . . Seeking a Balanced Viewpoint,"

Bookchin looks back to what has changed in his work and what abides. He clearly is satisfied with the thrust of the book, writing that "*The Ecology of Freedom* still remains the most comprehensive statement of my ideas and of social ecology generally," and he goes so far as to call it the keystone for subsequent work (Bookchin, 1991, p. xvi). He reminds us, however, that readers interested in the other aspects of social ecology, such as his views on the city, philosophy of nature, and dialectical method, should consult subsequent works (see, for example, *Urbanization Without Cities*, 1992, and *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, 1995a).

But, in 20 years' time, Bookchin has taken some new directions, motivated principally by changes in the ecology movement overall. As he bemoans in the new "Introduction," he feels that the major event of the last two decades has been the forfeiture of the radical potential of an ecology movement through the emergence of various mystical and antihumanist philosophies, such as deep ecology, ecofeminism, and postmodernism. When *The Ecology of Freedom* was first written, one of Bookchin's (1991) principal goals was "to advance a holistic, socially radical, and theoretically coherent alternative to the largely technocratic, reformist, and single-issue environmental movements that were holding center stage at that time" (p. xiii). Bookchin sharply distinguished his own social ecology from environmentalism. Unlike (liberal) environmentalism, which is merely "a mechanistic, instrumental outlook that sees nature as a passive habitat composed of 'objects' such as animals, plants, minerals, and the like that must be rendered serviceable for human use" (Bookchin, 1991, p. 21), social ecology appreciates the holistic richness of nature, breaks with the idea that human beings must dominate nature, and challenges the grow-or-die logic of capitalism, a logic that no liberal or reformist politics can alter.

Bookchin hoped that the reformist and technocratic outlook of environmentalism could be overcome in favor of decentralized green movements struggling for an ecological society. Yet, the emergence of the ecology movement he envisioned developed in ways sharply divergent from social ecology and the enlightenment ideals and Left libertarian political tradition he represents. To his great dismay, Bookchin witnessed what he saw to be new currents of irrationalism and misanthropy in the guise of a radical philosophy that at best would steer the ecology movement into safe channels of nature worship and new-age spirituality and at worst would advance ecofascist positions (e.g., neo-Malthusian analyses of overpopulation) and atavistic calls for a return to a preindustrial past.

As deep ecology, specifically, emerged on the U.S. scene in the early 1980s, Bookchin concluded that it was an even more regressive ideology than liberal environmentalism, for not only was it as blind to the social forces underlying environmental destruction and the alienation between human beings and the natural world, as was liberal environmentalism, it mystified social relations altogether in its appeal to spirituality and cosmic forces. Whereas environmentalism still retained the future-oriented, optimistic outlook of the enlightenment, deep ecology often sought to return to a hunting-and-gathering utopia. Whereas environmentalism clung to the faith that science and technology could be used on behalf of human betterment, deep ecology often attacked science, technology, and humanist aspirations, declaring rationality to be insidious and stigmatizing human beings as scourges on the earth. Whereas environmentalism still retained a semblance of the norm of social and collective change, deep ecology lapsed into individualist modes of change.

Thus, since *The Ecology of Freedom*, Bookchin has moved toward an even firmer rationalist, pro-enlightenment position, which is evident in his recent work



*Re-Enchanting Humanity* (1995b). Moreover, he has indefatigably championed the importance of a humanism that is neither anthropocentric nor biocentric, but rather underscores human uniqueness while also seeking complementary relations with the natural world. In his 1970s work, Bookchin (1980) spoke of the need for a new spirituality, a reverence of nature, and a new animism (p. 268). There was even an approving reference to the Asian and Indian philosophies that inspired the counter-culture (Bookchin, 1980). Additionally, on numerous occasions in *The Ecology of Freedom*, he appealed to myths and legends to underscore his arguments (e.g., Bookchin, 1991, pp. 16-17, 366).

Today, all of this causes Bookchin to wince, and he has struggled to eliminate any trace of myth, mysticism, and spiritualism from his work. He now rejects the phrase "reverence for nature," for example, because for him it implies appeal to deities, worship, and submission of human beings to nature rather than creates a complementary relation to nature from an ecological position.<sup>4</sup> Although one could argue that this represents a maturing of his scientific outlook, eliminating the new-age patina of the 1960s, it also could be viewed as an intransigent rationalism that limits a broad reception of his work, given the fact that for better or worse, most people do not respond enthusiastically to scientific materialism. Bookchin refuses, a priori, to grant any legitimacy to a politics of spirituality, failing to acknowledge the various ways that people become politicized, not all of which include studying Hegel. Despite some very important and powerful critiques of deep ecology, Bookchin increasingly narrows his conception of rationality to the point at which nonrational (which is not to say irrational) sensibilities drop out altogether, leaving us with something very close to positivism that sees all nonverifiable realms of experience as literally meaningless.

Ironically, as John Clark (1997, in press) notes, Bookchin, the master of dialectics, often advances decidedly undialectical positions that transform differences into rigid opposites and disallow mediations, interpenetrations, overlaps, and interplays. One sees this in the many antitheses Bookchin constructs, such as between freedom and justice, local and national politics, and deep and social ecology. One also finds a binary opposition between modern and postmodern thought and a totalizing critique of all postmodern positions as irredeemably regressive. Like Habermas, Bookchin tars all postmodernists as conservative or reactionary and fails to draw elemental distinctions between different kinds of postmodern positions, some of which are useful for his own modernist politics (see, for example, Bookchin, 1995b, 172-204; for a different kind of critical perspective on postmodern theory, see Best & Kellner, 1991, 1997, in press). Similarly, Bookchin advances an essentializing critique of deep ecology, as he fails to distinguish between different kinds of positions and to note qualifications on and even outright rejections of positions he attributes to deep ecologists. Bookchin's overheated rhetoric reinforces binary oppositions, and he tends to create unbridgeable differences with other viewpoints and to alienate potential collaborators (see, for example, his recent break with *Democracy and Nature*).<sup>5</sup>

Despite his detailed analyses and astonishing range of topics, there are glaring deficiencies and lacunae in Bookchin's work. To mention just a few points, he still has not elaborated an ethical position beyond fragmented ideas, although it is crucial for his utopian politics and critique of capitalism. Relatedly, Bookchin has not carefully unpacked the normative underpinnings of his theory of freedom. He also needs a more careful elaboration of the problems with hierarchy and a clear

distinction between hierarchy and authority, noting which kinds of authority are acceptable and which are not. He has not seriously confronted arguments that biology in fact plays a major role in human culture and conflict (see Sagan & Druyan, 1992). He has also not convincingly argued for the viability of anarchist politics in a huge technocratic country such as the United States or offered concrete suggestions for how to engage the citizenry, especially given the hegemonic hold of mass media, a problem that he does not address. Bookchin seems wedded to a nostalgia for Athenian democracy, as is evident in his insistence that politics involve face-to-face interaction, which denies a priori any use of mass media or computer technologies for radical politics.

Similarly, Bookchin offers no analysis of crucial ecological issues such as the disappearance of wilderness and wildlife. He clearly decries the loss of ecological diversity, but he does not aggressively champion the preservation of land and species as a fundamental social policy. In part, this is perhaps because these issues are discussed by deep ecologists, and Bookchin rejects their phrasing without offering his own, although a social ecology perspective clearly would have much to say about the social, political, and economic dynamics behind wilderness destruction and species extinction.

Bookchin also does not take a strong stand against the overpopulation problem, another focus of deep ecology as opposed to social ecology. Fearful of any position smacking of Malthusianism, Bookchin steadfastly ignores the problem except to point to areas where population numbers are going down and to target, rightly so, Western lifestyles as more critical an issue than increases of people in underdeveloped countries. It seems that the root problem here is the modernist mind-set of Bookchin which, although constantly attacking the irrational growth imperatives of capitalism, seems content that the world can handle a half dozen billion people or more.

In the end, whatever his flaws and limitations, Bookchin has bequeathed to radical thought and practice indispensable tools for linking society and the natural world. He has given us a much better understanding of power and domination than have Marxists, and his analysis of hierarchy anticipated postmodern analyses of decentralized and ubiquitous forms of micropower (e.g., Foucault, 1977). He has thrown a powerful spotlight on problems with ecological positions that are overly, if not strictly, spiritualistic and with glib dismissals of reason, humanism, and modern thought in general. Perhaps more than any other thinker, he has kept the anarchist tradition alive and made decisive contributions by linking classical anarchist insights regarding proper political forms to an ecological framework. Bookchin stands in a league by himself in his ability to contextualize environmental issues in a rich framework that is at once historical, philosophical, scientific, political, and utopian. The questions Bookchin poses for human beings and the fate of the earth are: Can we disentangle the dual legacies of freedom and domination to consciously and collectively promote the Eros of freedom rather than the Thanatos of domination? Can we bring the heritage of the past into an emancipatory future, qualitatively different from the present, that harmonizes social and natural evolution, or will the juggernaut of global capitalism continue to colonize the earth, homogenize and degrade both society and nature, and ultimately shut down the life support systems of the planet?

The answers demand a social ecology viewpoint; just how this should be articulated remains open, with Bookchin as teacher and guide but not as prophet—

as his own anarchist views must have it. This is why much current writing is seeking to redefine social ecology after Bookchin.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, Kovel (1993) and Bradford (1993). In some ways, John Clark's (1997, in press) recent work can be seen as an attempt to mediate deep and social ecology, although Clark, once a close follower of Bookchin, has become increasingly hostile to Bookchin's version of social ecology and has struggled to redefine social ecology as "eco-communitarian politics." Symptomatically, the second edition of the Zimmerman volume in which Clark is a coeditor has dropped Bookchin's essay on social ecology. For responses to Clark's redefinition of social ecology, see *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* (1998).

2. The focus of this essay is on Bookchin's analysis of hierarchy rather than on his theory of freedom, which is rich in implications but vague and underdeveloped. Negatively, Bookchin understands freedom as freedom from two things: domination and hierarchy and necessity and want. No one can be truly free when they have to struggle for the basic necessities of life or when they are subjugated to a minority elite. Positively, humans require freedom to realize the fullest dimensions of their capacities for creativity, innovation, and self-management. Because Bookchin's notion of personal freedom is much more akin to the Greeks than modern liberalism, personal freedom is possible only in a nourishing social and political context. Bookchin understands autonomy "not in the liberal sense of radical independence from all others in society, but rather in the Greek sense of self-management in the *polis*, in the decentralized community governed by direct democracy.

Clearly, there is an ecological dimension to the concept of freedom in that human beings can flourish only if the biotic surroundings of their lives thrive. Moreover, Bookchin's concept of freedom is developed in strict contrast with the (economic) notion of justice and revolves around a particular concept of equality, the equality of unequals, such as Bookchin found to exist in organic society. For Bookchin, this is the only authentic form of equality because it recognizes differences between individuals in age, sex, physical ability, intelligence, and so forth, and thereby seeks to compensate for these to equalize the inequalities that can give rise to hierarchy and domination. Only when society recognizes real differences between individuals can it address imbalances and compensate for them, employing institutions such as usufruct and the irreducible minimum. In other words, the notion of the equality of unequals is a dialectical notion that recognizes difference in unity and unity in difference. It affirms inequality to create a richer notion of equality, such that those who need more resources or assistance can take more to equalize themselves in relation to those who are more fortunate by biological or social fact. To produce genuine freedom through the equality of unequals, one first has to acknowledge inequalities among individuals to compensate for them and, thereby, to reach a position of relative equality.

3. I say "controversial" because Bookchin reduces antagonistic relations to nature to the social and conceptual realms, in effect denying any independent dynamic whereby human beings, even in a harmonious society, might not relate as well to the natural world. For an argument against this position in Bookchin, see Eckersley (1992).

4. Similarly, Bookchin (1991) feels that his references to the work of Horkheimer and Adorno were not critical enough of their undialectical critique of reason and their political pessimism (p. lix). Bookchin seeks a defense of reason against any totalizing outlook that equates reason with domination and that fails to recover its critical and ethical dimensions.

5. *Democracy and Nature* (1997, Vol. 3, No. 3) is a journal that has devoted much space to Bookchin's views. In his debate with deep ecology, Bookchin has made attempts at alliances and even rapprochement, such as in his dialogues with Dave Foreman (Bookchin & Foreman, 1991). Although his critics skewer him for being dogmatic and sectarian, Bookchin maintains his distance on the grounds that alliances with reactionary positions such as he finds in deep ecology can only damage a potential ecology movement.

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